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PREVENTIVE ACTION IN COLLEGE MENTAL HEALTH.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA HAS BEEN DEVELOPING PROGRAMS TO STUDY AND PREVENT THE EMOTIONAL STRESS EXPERIENCED BY STUDENTS WHEN THEY MAKE THE TRANSITION FROM HOME TO COLLEGE. A UNIVERSITY MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAM WHICH IS PREVENTION-ORIENTED HAS BEEN DEVELOPED. THE PROJECT PROPOSED IN THIS PAPER IS AN INTENSIVE STUDY OF THE TRANSITIONAL EXPERIENCES, STRESSES, AND RESULTING BEHAVIORS OF FRESHMEN AND TRANSFER STUDENTS. THE STUDY WILL LEAD TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF ORIENTATION PROGRAMS AND COUNSELING PROGRAMS TO MEET THE NEEDS OF ENTERING STUDENTS. INTERVIEWS WITH APPROXIMATELY 300 STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA ARE PLANNED TO DETERMINE THE INDEXES OF EMOTIONAL VULNERABILITY. THE INDEXES ESTABLISHED WILL BE USED FOR THE SELECTION OF MEASURING INSTRUMENTS AND CONTINUED CROSS VALIDATION OF EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS FOUND. WORKSHOPS FOR COUNSELORS OF HIGH SCHOOLS AND JUNIOR COLLEGES WILL FOLLOW TO GIVE THE COUNSELORS AN OPPORTUNITY TO INTERVIEW STUDENTS AND DISCOVER WAYS OF PREPARING THEM FOR THE TRANSITIONAL EXPERIENCES. A SUMMER ORIENTATION PROGRAM FOR PARENTS AND STUDENTS ON READINESS FOR COLLEGE IS ALSO PLANNED. EVALUATION OF THE STUDY AND THE INSTITUTED PROGRAMS THROUGH SUBSEQUENT STUDENT INTERVIEWS AND COUNSELOR WORKSHOPS IS THE FINAL PHASE OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT. (NS)

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PREVENTIVE ACTION IN COLLEGE MENTAL HEALTH*

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PREVENTIVE ACTION IN COLLEGE MENTAL HEALTH

THE PROBLEM

For many students, the period of transition from the home environment to the university environment provides an experience of "discontinuity" (Benedict, 1938) which subjects their adaptive resources to considerable strain. Srole and his associates in their important Midtown Manhattan Study (1962) singled out role discontinuity as one of the three major "social phenomena contributing to emotional morbidity." Further, they specify that ". . .role transitions occur in especially rapid sequence during adolescence and early adulthood, e.g., puberty, entering high school, dating, entering college, launching a career, and courtship." To this list we might add marriage and beginning a family. Erikson (1959), too, has highlighted adolescence as a critical period of personality consolidation and synthesis necessary for the development of the adult identity. His careful description of the adolescent identity crisis, particularly as it is found among college students has drawn attention to the need for greater understanding of this important period of development. Sanford, too, in the concluding chapter of The American College (1962) has emphasized the importance of studying the determinants of change in the college student, and designates late adolescence as one of the neglected areas of developmental psychology.

The proposed project will focus on this period in the life cycle, during which the transition from home to college and resulting experiences of discontinuity constitute an important source of emotional distress. In addition, preventive programs related to the transitional process will be developed and evaluated. These will be designed to help students and those who work with them to better understand the nature of the transitional crises of this period in order to deal with them more effectively. Both Bower (1960) and Caplan (1964) have emphasized the value of intervention during crisis, when individuals are particularly receptive to help.

BACKGROUND

Two general developments at the University of Florida make it an especially good laboratory for the study of this transition period, and for the development and evaluation of the programs of prevention proposed below. During the past five years, the staff of the Mental Health Service, Department of Student Health, University of Florida has been developing a University Mental Health Service emphasizing public health concepts. This has been done with support from National Institute of Mental Health Project Grant MH 380. This project has had four interrelated aspects.

1. Programs of consultation and mental health education have been offered to key university personnel in the interest of developing an increasingly effective program of early identification and intervention within the existing university structure.

2. A program of demographic and epidemiologic research has been undertaken for the purpose of identifying those conditions within the university community and those within the student which contribute to disruptive emotional distress.

3. A program of mental health services has been developed to meet the needs of students whose problems represent the full range of emotional adjustment. This includes diagnostic and referral services for the most acute and most chronic disturbances and brief treatment for a wide range of the less severe or less chronic problems.

4. A program of graduate training emphasizing the concepts and methods of this project has been offered in order to help prepare mental health professionals to serve the growing demands from community and university mental health programs.

A fuller description of this program is to be found in the accompanying Conference Proceedings. During the establishment of this project, extensive commitment to the concepts of prevention, early identification and intervention have developed in the university community and broad participation in programs of early detection and intervention have been achieved.

The second significant development is the program of summer orientation for beginning freshmen which was instituted three years ago. This has been so successful (nearly 80% of entering freshmen and a majority of their parents took advantage of this program during the past summer) that plans are underway to extend it in two directions. (a) To include lower division transfer students as well as beginning freshmen, and (b) to extend the one-day period of orientation. This would enable the university to obtain additional evaluation of students at that time, thus permitting the identification of students needing remedial programs in either the academic or social-emotional spheres, in time to institute such programs during the summer, prior to admission. The project outlined below proposes the development and evaluation of such an early identification and intervention program.

AIMS

The proposed project is designed to study systematically and in some depth, the transitional experiences and adaptive behavior of

successive samples of entering students. These studies will be undertaken with several purposes in mind: (a) to help define the sources of vulnerability in students entering the university for which corrective intervention can be effectively undertaken; (b) to guide the development of action programs for early intervention which may be expected to meet with some measure of success, and (c) to provide counselor and guidance personnel in the university and in the Florida high schools and junior colleges with realistic frames of reference regarding transitional experiences and coping behavior of students entering the university. In other words, the data of these studies will be fed back into action programs of early identification, early intervention, and mental health education.

SIGNIFICANCE

The establishment of the proposed project will permit the development and evaluation of action programs based on concepts and methods of preventive mental health. The project will take advantage of the groundwork that has been laid during the five-year development of a university mental health program which is prevention oriented.

The proposed action programs will be more truly preventive than the current university programs, in that intervention will be introduced into the period prior to admission, when the student is preparing for college.

The project will involve mental health personnel, university, junior college and high school administrative and counseling personnel, as well as students and their parents in a collaborative effort to understand more fully and more clearly the sources of transitional distress associated with leaving home to enter university life and to develop ways of dealing with these more effectively. Such a cooperative undertaking not only should increase the understanding of transitional phenomena by the many people who will be involved in the project, but it should also contribute to the body of knowledge in this important area. In addition, it should contribute to mutual understanding and respect among the personnel of the many institutions involved and help to establish lines of communication that will facilitate consultation, referral, early identification and intervention among those who are most concerned with students in transition.

The project will provide a program model by which other universities and colleges may be guided in attacking the transitional problems of their students. It may also have application in other types of institutional settings by providing some general principles regarding the handling of transitional experiences and some guidelines for studying them.

It will provide opportunities for mental health professionals in training as well as graduate students in the social sciences and other helping professions to assimilate concepts and to develop skills in consultation, mental health education, research and program development. These concepts and skills will be applicable in the educational settings, community mental health centers, and other institutional settings in which they will be employed. These students, with their faculty advisors, will augment the research and program capabilities of the project through their utilization of project data and participation in project research, program development and evaluation in their master's and doctoral programs.

FACILITIES AND RESOURCES AVAILABLE

The University of Florida has a current student population of 15,000 students. Of the students entering the university last fall, there were approximately 2300 beginning freshmen, 800 lower division transfer students, and 1000 upper division transfer students. The last group is growing rapidly.

The active interest and support of the university administration and the commitment of this university to early identification and early orientation have already been described.

The Mental Health Service staff is very adequately housed in the University Infirmary, occupying ten offices for professional and clerical staff and graduate assistants. In addition, a library/conference room, mimeograph, photocopy, dictating equipment, and other facilities of the Student Health Service are at the disposal of the project staff. Books and articles which constitute basic readings in this area have been assembled.

A substantial amount of basic data has been collected from nearly 20,000 students during the past five years and has been stored on IBM data cards and tapes. These data include personality and interest inventory scores, background and experience information, which have been obtained during the orientation period each trimester in testing sessions conducted by the project staff.

The resources of the University Computing Center, the Board of University Examiners, and the Office of the Registrar are available for project use. These offices provide student data and such facilities as optic reading test-scoring machines, collators, and reproducers with mark-sensing equipment, two 3K 1401 data processors, and a 709 computer with a substantial library of computer programs.

METHOD OF PROCEDURE

It is proposed that an intensive study of the transitional experiences, stresses, and coping behaviors of two successive random samples of entering students be undertaken. Independent evaluations will be made for freshmen, lower division transfer students (LDT), and upper division transfer students (UDT). This will make it possible to develop programs of orientation, early intervention, and "anticipatory counseling" (Caplan, 1964) that are tailored to the special needs of each of these student sub-groups.

Such programs will be instituted and their relative effectiveness will be evaluated. Also, a program of mental health education workshops will be undertaken for junior college and high school counselors utilizing the findings of the intensive studies of students and providing opportunities for them to evaluate directly the transitional experiences of students from their own institutions.

SPECIFIC PROPOSAL

Phase I. The first phase of the project will be devoted to the development of structured interview schedules designed to assess the transitional experiences and stresses of students who have left home to enter the University of Florida. This undertaking will be guided by the excellent work of Silber and his associates (1961) in their intensive study of 15 outstanding students during the period in which they were selecting and preparing for college. The interviews will be intended to yield information from which a classification of transitional experiences and stresses may be made. In addition, an attempt will be made to develop from the interview material, a set of temporal profiles which describe the sequence of experiences and coping behaviors which are typical of representative segments of the entering student body.

The basic interview schedule will be varied slightly to make it appropriate for the specific circumstances of beginning freshmen, lower division transfer students (LDT) and upper division transfer students (UDT). It will consist of three sections. One will deal with the period of preparation for college; one will deal with the period of adaptation to the university, and the third will provide for classification of the areas of vulnerability shown by a student and for rating the degree of vulnerability he is judged to have. The Midtown Manhattan schedule provides some useful guidelines for the construction of the interview. To facilitate the development of the schedule, approximately 100 students randomly selected from among those entering the university in September 1965, will be interviewed, utilizing the evolving interview schedule.

When a satisfactory schedule is developed, at least 100 students will be selected randomly from each of the groups entering in September 1965 (freshmen, LDT, and UDT). They will be interviewed for the purposes of: (a) determining the types of transitional experiences, stresses, and coping behaviors which are characteristic of freshmen, LDT's and UDT's respectively, and (b) rating the degree of emotional-social vulnerability each student is judged to exhibit. These ratings will provide a representative epidemiological survey of emotional problems among entering university students. Further, they will serve as criterion measures against which a set of indices of emotional vulnerability may be developed, using the MMPI and background questionnaire (Appendix D) items as predictors. Instruments yielding self-perception and evaluation of the university will also be selected for administration at this time. Analyses will be made which take into account both type and degree of vulnerability. The classification task and the analyses necessary for the development of the vulnerability indices will be undertaken during the summer trimester of 1966.

Phase II. In September 1966 the MMPI and the background questionnaire will again be administered to all incoming students during the orientation period. During the fall trimester three new samples of at least 100 students each will be randomly selected and interviewed, using the interview schedule developed during the previous year. These interviews will be undertaken to cross-validate and refine the classification of transitional stresses that was developed during the first phase of the project. They will provide a new epidemiological survey of student emotional problems and will establish a new set of criterion measures against which to cross-validate the indices of emotional vulnerability.

In order to determine the reliability of the vulnerability ratings, the same 300 students will be re-interviewed and independently rerated during the winter trimester. These interviews will also be undertaken to determine additional ways in which these students have adapted to the university situation.

The summer trimester will be devoted to analysing the reliability of the vulnerability ratings, cross-validating the vulnerability indices, and identifying the special transitional problems experienced respectively by freshmen and both lower and upper division transfer students. This material will be prepared for use in a set of mental health workshops to be held with counseling personnel throughout the university and from the junior colleges and high schools which send a substantial number of students to the university each year.

Phase III. During the fall trimester of 1967, a program of mental health education will be developed which will involve junior college counselors and interested administrators. At least one counselor from each of the approximately 20 junior colleges from which 20

or more students come to the University each year, will be invited to participate in two-day workshops, in groups of about 10 counselors at a time. These workshops will consist of a period of orientation to the workshop itself, to a structured interview which will have been developed for this purpose, and to some of the more relevant findings of the preceding year's studies. The counselor from each college will then be scheduled to interview at least 10 students who had transferred from that college to the University at the beginning of the current school year.

The focus of these interviews will be on factors and experiences which the student found had prepared him well or poorly for university life. Students who had completed junior college (UDT's) and those who had not (LDT's) will both be scheduled for these interviews, in order that the counselors may identify problems that are common and those that are more specific to one group or the other.

Following these series of interviews, the counselors will reassemble and be joined by representatives of the Mental Health Service, the University Counseling Center, the residence counseling staff, and the Dean of Student Affairs office. A review session will be conducted in which the counselors will summarize what they have learned from the interviews with their former students. The attention of the entire group will be directed toward planning programs for dealing with the problems thus identified. This will mean that attention is focused on the development of preventive programs at both the junior college and the university level. Any particularly abrasive circumstances within the university to which these students draw attention will be brought directly to the attention of the Office of Student Affairs where the responsibility and the authority for taking corrective action lies. The junior college counselors, too, may take back with them plans for program improvement which will prepare their students better for university life, or at least help them make more realistic choices regarding their continuing education.

These workshops will serve the additional purpose of developing mutual understanding and respect, and of establishing better lines of communication among the several agencies and institutions involved. This should facilitate consultation, referral and interagency cooperation in early detection and intervention. Thus the goals of prevention will be served.

Involvement of parents in the early identification and intervention processes is considered important because of the significant place which the family continues to hold in the awareness and feelings of the entering student, and the key role which parents can play in determining the relative smoothness of the transition from home to university. In terms of early identification, parents may be helped to indicate possible sources of vulnerability in the entering student by

means of an appropriate questionnaire. In fact, students themselves may be helped to evaluate their own readiness for the emotional demands of university life through the medium of an appropriately worded questionnaire.

During the winter trimester, therefore, two such questionnaires will be developed, guided in large part by the findings of the preceding two year's study.

Pertinent material from the indices of emotional vulnerability as well as from the structured interviews will determine much of the content of these questionnaires. They will be intended to stimulate a frank assessment of such factors as: (a) the degree of interest and satisfaction derived from academic work; (b) readiness for independent decision-making and self maintenance; (c) readiness for group living, especially coping with a roommate; (d) tolerance for sustained academic effort; (e) tolerance for widely varying social, cultural, and moral values, and (f) adequacy of social skills.

The quality of the relationship with parents has been found so often to be related to the insecurity, despair, frustration or antagonism which interfere with students' effectiveness and contribute to their emotional distress. Because this is true, an effort will be made in a portion of each questionnaire to get students and their parents to evaluate the quality of the communication, understanding, and mutual respect which exists between them. Such an evaluation should provide a first step toward initiating corrective action where the need exists. Several alternative methods of facilitating such corrective action will be undertaken and evaluated.

During the summer trimester, the students and parents who attend the summer orientation program will participate in the following early identification and anticipatory counseling programs. Two groups per week of approximately 150 students and their parents will come to the university campus for summer orientation.

The following four programs will be presented in rotation. (a) The current orientation program will provide a control condition. (b) The questionnaires, designed to help students and parents evaluate the adequacy of the student's preparation for university life and the quality of intra-family communication and understanding, will be administered in separate group sessions for parents and students. Following completion of the questionnaires, both students and parents will be encouraged to discuss between them and/or with some other appropriate person in their home community any matters of concern which may have been brought to their attention. (c) The questionnaire will be administered in separate group sessions. Following completion of the questionnaires, the major factors covered by the questionnaires will be discussed briefly and time will be allotted for questions and

discussion. (d) Group discussions will be scheduled to draw the attention of students and parents to the common as well as the more serious problems faced by students in transition. This will enable parents and students to recognize problems of transition about which they may need to take corrective action.

Throughout the 14 weeks of the summer orientation program, each series of four orientation groups will receive one of the four types of orientation outlined above. These will be presented in an order which controls for any temporal factors which may influence selectively the composition of the groups.

Phase IV. During the fall trimester, 1968, 100 students from each of the anticipatory counseling and control conditions will be interviewed. This will be done to determine the relative effectiveness of each form of intervention. Effectiveness will be defined both in terms of the students' stated satisfaction with the results of the intervention and the relative number of kinds of intervention or preparatory actions that were undertaken by the students (or parents).

During the latter part of the fall trimester and the early part of the winter trimester, mental health workshops of the kind held for junior college counselors will be conducted for counselors from the approximately 40 high schools from which 20 or more students come to the University of Florida each year. A similar program outline will be followed, for the same purposes.

During the latter part of the winter trimester and throughout the summer trimester 1969, the aspects of the identification and anticipatory counseling programs which have been found to be effective will be established as continuing aspects of the summer orientation program by preparing the material in booklet form, on audio and/or video tape. The materials will be tailored to the needs of freshmen and both lower division and upper division transfer students.

Phase V. During the final phase of the project (September 1969 - August 1970) a conference will be arranged for counseling, mental health, and administrative personnel from all Florida universities, colleges, and junior colleges to review the methods and findings of the project. A similar conference will be arranged for representative universities throughout the southeastern region. The staff will make themselves available for consultation with colleges and universities or individuals who request help in utilizing the findings. A full report of the project will be prepared for publication.

SUMMARY

The foregoing proposal represents an attempt to develop an action program in university mental health which has the following key features:

1. It is based on public health or community mental health concepts with emphasis on prevention.

2. It builds a program of preventive action on a foundation of focused research and provides continuing evaluation so that corrective measures and program improvements may be instituted as needed.

3. It attempts to differentiate the special needs and problems of students with differing preparatory experiences and to tailor corrective intervention to these special needs.

4. It gives recognition to the continuing importance of the family in the emotional well-being of the college student during his transition from home to university.

5. It emphasizes the importance of feedback to junior colleges and high schools, of information that will help counselors and teachers guide their students in preparing themselves better for university life.

6. It proposes the introduction of a program of anticipatory counseling as part of summer orientation which will further help students and their parents evaluate the student's readiness for the emotional demands of university life and suggest approaches to preparatory action.

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